



# Ethical considerations in Psychology

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An overview



# What are ethics?

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- As a Psychology student you will encounter ethical guidelines and considerations as part of your studies: these are crucial to the study and practice of Psychology as you will soon see.
- This brief power point is an overview of the key guidelines that you must adhere to as part of your commitment to studying psychology
- These slides are not exhaustive, but a reminder of the importance of ethical awareness and competence as a psychology student.
- For full details please refer to the BPS full documentation available from the School Moodle page.



# Conducting Psychological Research: Ethics

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## APA Principles

- Beneficence and Nonmaleficence
- Fidelity and Responsibility
- Integrity
- Justice
- Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

## BPS Principles

- Respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities
- Scientific integrity
- Social responsibility
- Maximising benefit and minimising harm



# Ethical costs of conducting research

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- The issue concerns the relative balance between ethical costs and scientific benefits as a whole
- We must ask certain questions-
- What are the benefits to society and the economy?
- What are the benefits to individual participants?
- What are the negative consequences to society or participants?
- What are the risk management techniques used by psychologists?



# Ethics is much more than what happens to our participants!

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- There can be huge benefits such as help to those with mental illnesses,
- A deeper understanding of societal problems and
- The development of a greater empathy for individuals

- However, there are still major issues associated with-
- Accountability,
- The fuelling of prejudice and discrimination
- Therefore, can the 'harm' ever be justified?



# What constitutes as a benefit?

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- Knowledge and understanding?
- Treatments?
- Government policy?
- Increased awareness?
- Practical applications?
- Each of these is has a utilitarian function...



# What constitutes as an ethical cost?

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- Psychological harm
- Trauma
- Breach of confidentiality
- Lack of privacy
- Deception
- Lack of a right to withdraw
- Fully informed consent
- WHY? Because both humans and animals are sentient. We feel pain, emotion etc. This is morally unacceptable in terms of psychological research.
- As a generally accepted rule, participants should never be subjected to any risks over and above those they would be expected to encounter in everyday life.



# Weighing up costs and benefits

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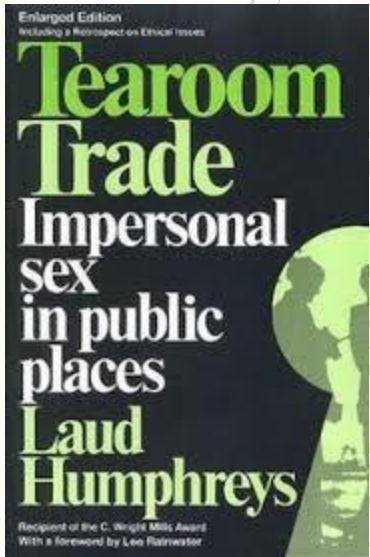
- Double obligation dilemma
  - Scientific benefits
  - Ethical costs
- Potential negative effects for society
- Risk management-
  - Deception
  - Risk
  - Valid consent
  - Confidentiality
  - Privacy



# Classic examples of unethical studies

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- Bargh, J. A., Chen, M., & Burrows, L. (1996). Automaticity of social behavior: Direct effects of trait construct and stereotype activation on action. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 71(2), 230.
- Haney, C., Banks, W. C., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1973). Study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison. *Naval Research Reviews*, 9(1-17).
- Harris, J. R. (1995). Where is the child's environment? A group socialization theory of development. *Psychological review*, 102(3), 458.
- Libet, B., Gleason, C. A., Wright, E. W., & Pearl, D. K. (1983). Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness-potential) the unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act. *Brain*, 106(3), 623-642.
- Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(4), 371.
- Watson, J. B., & Rayner, R. (1920). Conditioned emotional reactions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 3(1), 1.



# An example:

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- In the 1970's Sociology PhD student Laud Humphreys posed as a watch queen and observed men having sex in public toilets.
- He recorded their vehicle registration plates to be able to track them down at a later date.
- A year later, disguised as a Health researcher, he visited around 50 of the men in their homes, asking them questions regarding their personal life.
- Without realising they had met him before, the men spoke about their lives, and most lived 'model' family lives with wives and children.
- What is wrong with this?